

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

Bathing in Loving Care

BY STEVE

Recently I took part in a celebration of the Buddha's birthday, which was organized by the University of Lynchburg's Buddhist Community. The ceremony took place in the front yard of the Spiritual Life Center on a windy afternoon. On this date (April 8), Buddhist communities around the world gathered together to celebrate the birth of the Buddha. That we assembled outdoors was fitting. Queen Maya, the Buddha's mother, was said to have given birth outdoors. The Buddha emerged from her right side and immediately took seven steps. White lotus flowers—symbols of mental and spiritual purity—sprang up in each spot where his feet touched the earth.

In our ceremony, a statue of the Buddha as a child stood in a blue container. One hand pointed up and the other pointed down, symbolizing his vow to unite heaven and earth in his person. Each of us present walked up to the statue and reflected. I contemplated the Buddha's life, his teaching, and the community that had welcomed me into their fellowship. All of these values had been poured into the statue through the creativity of the artist. Three times I cupped a handful of water and bathed the statue. For many Buddhists, this ritual represents the cleansing of our body, thoughts, and speech. In doing so, anger, greed, and ignorance are eradicated. When we physically bathe the statue of the Buddha, we are symbolically bathing our body-mind—the particular bundling of mind and body in this life. We are practicing self-care, even though we may not necessarily conceive of it in this way.

As I bathed the statue of the Buddha, I recalled the experience of bathing my son Sam when he was a baby. His first bathtub was the kitchen sink. When it was bath time, I would start our ritual by cleaning the sink. Then while the water filled, I would drop to my knees and say "hindy-ho," a made-up word that my spouse's family used when she and her siblings were young. It meant, essentially, raise your arms so that your shirt can be taken off.

CONT'D ON P. 2



This issue:

"Bathing in Loving Care"
by Dr. Steve Dawson

PAGE 01

Sympathies, Concerns,
& Congrats

PAGE 02

Dates to Remember

PAGE 02

Summer Internship
Opportunity

PAGE 03

Bathing in Loving Care (cont'd)

His hands in the air, I would pull his onesie over his head. Then I would lower him into the bath and, cupping my hand, pour warm water over his shoulders, chest, and back. We used a special bar of baby soap that we dubbed the Slippery Customer. As I chased the Slippery Customer around the sink, Sam would laugh at the misadventures of the world's slipperiest bar of soap. While we played, I would gently wash his small body. Afterwards I would swaddle him in a towel, sometimes taking a moment to snuggle him close. Then I would set him on the floor and sometimes he would become his own Slippery Customer, wiggling out of the towel and streaking away.

For me, taking part in the ritual bathing of the statue of the Buddha is, like my memories of bathing baby Sam, a profound symbol of what I will call "loving-care" (an allusion to the Buddhist idea of *metta*, or "loving-kindness"). What makes loving-care powerful in practice is its reflexivity: in caring for others in love, I care for myself. Self-care cannot be separated from care of others. This is what I learned on that windy day in early April when I gathered with the Buddhist Community to celebrate the Buddha's birthday.

Sympathies, Concerns, and Congrats

Our sympathies are extended to:

- **Julie Williams** (Humanities) on the death of her aunt. Dorothy Guill McDaniel died on Sunday, April 24. Link to full obituary may be found below the images in the email.

The Chaplain's Corner is a newsletter published by the Spiritual Life Center (SLC) at the University of Lynchburg. We share campus concerns and updates, spiritual life events and activities, and words for the journey. If you have a joy or concern you'd like to share, reply to this message, email the SLC office - spirituallife@lynchburg.edu, or call 434.544.8348. We only share with your permission. Current and previous issues are on the SLC page of the University website - go to Link in signature (www.lynchburg.edu/spiritual-life) and click on "Newsletter."

For more information about the Spiritual Life Center, including info on student spiritual life groups, go to our webpage - link in the email signature. You can also visit our Linkt.ree (link is in email).

Dates to Remember

April 2 - May 1
RAMADAN
in the United States

TONIGHT! Wednesday, April 27
6:30 - 8 p.m. in the Ballroom
SOUND BATH with Greg Burns

Thursday, April 28
6 p.m. in Snidow Chapel
YOM HASHOAH SERVICE
Holocaust Remembrance Day

Wednesday, May 4
11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.
SPIRITUAL LIFE POP-UP
Theme: Just Breathe
Hosted by Earth Spirituality

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